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The War on S

As Washington steps up defenses against a growing security threat, critics warn against overreaction.

Shaken by a rash of spy scandals, the White House and Congress are mounting a major counterattack against foreign espionage operations in the U.S.

The campaign seeks to fight hostile intelligence activities by curtailing the army of Soviet agents in the United States, strengthening the government's counterintelligence arm, deterring Americans from selling secrets and curbing the number who are cleared to handle sensitive information.

Three spy cases now in the courts are responsible for ringing alarm bells on Capitol Hill over what is perceived as a growing security threat.

In one, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for the first time ever, is accused of passing secret documents to a female KGB agent, who was his lover.

In a second, a former Central Intelligence Agency employe is alleged to have given her Ghanaian boyfriend secrets of American intelligence operations in Africa.

The third case—the most worrisome in the view of counterintelligence specialists—involves a retired Navy chief warrant officer, John Anthony Walker; his sailor son; his brother, who is a retired Navy officer, and a friend, who also served in the Navy. They are charged with selling vital military secrets to the Soviets over more than a decade.

These cases add to widespread uneasiness over a KGB drive to acquire advanced American technology that is banned for export to the U.S.S.R.

Tightening security. As Washington seeks to seize the initiative in the war against spies, it is Congress that is setting the pace. Previously rejected measures now being seriously considered by lawmakers would—

- Expand the use of polygraphs. Lawmakers are conferring on legislation that would give the Pentagon the green light to use polygraphs to test the loyalty of defense and contractor personnel. Over the next two years, the Pentagon is authorized to run 10,500 mandatory lie-detector tests on defense and contractor personnel with access to the government's most sensitive information.
- Stiffen penalties for espionage. Some in Congress are calling for the execution of spies uncovered in the armed forces during peacetime, contrasting with the present maximum punishment of 10 years' imprisonment.
- Intensify security checks. After the Walker case came to light, Congress added 25 million dollars to the Pentagon's budget to finance an extra 150,000 reinvestigations of personnel previously given security clearances. Defense Investigative Service officials say that the money will enable them to increase the number of street agents by 50 percent.

In addition to these moves to deter Americans from turning to espionage, Congress is taking steps to reduce the threat posed by the 2,600 Soviet-bloc diplomats stationed in the United States. The FBI estimates that one third of these are actively engaged in spying.

This small army of Soviet agents is expected to be reduced by legislation that would permit Moscow to keep no more diplomats in the U.S. than the number of American officials stationed in the U.S.S.R.

At the same time, lawmakers are trying to cramp the style of an estimated 200 Kremlin spies based at the United Nations by making all Soviet-bloc diplomats assigned to the world organization get State Department permission for travel, thereby making FBI surveillance easier.

The administration, while endorsing enthusiastically most congressional initiatives, has its own agenda in the antispy campaign. Its major effort is directed at tightening security by curtailing the number of people cleared to handle secret information.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger has directed that 10 percent of the 4.3 million security clearances held by Pentagon employes and contractors be revoked by October 1. An even more ambitious and controversial cutback is being pursued by Navy Secretary John Lehman, who hopes to slice the Navy's clearances in half. In two months, he has achieved a 19 percent reduction, eliminating 170,000 and downgrading 63,000.

Not all of the administration's efforts are aimed at individuals. Other reforms given new impetus by the [illegible] and stepped-up surveillance at defense plants during off hours.

Taking it to the KGB. The Walker case also has boosted efforts to expand counterintelligence by the FBI. An administration official says that President Reagan does not intend to concentrate on passive measures—such as limiting security clearances—but aims to focus also on monitoring and investigating hostile intelligence officers in the U.S.

Actually, the administration quietly and steadily over the past four years has added funding for counterintelligence, with the support of the intelligence committees in Congress. Although details are top secret, some threads of the new activities can be discerned.

The FBI is stepping up electronic surveillance in an effort to uncover espionage in this country. At the same time, the CIA is helping friendly governments identify and thwart Soviet agents overseas in a strategy calculated to disrupt KGB operations wherever possible. In the past two years, over

FBI agent Richard Miller is shown in surveillance photo with Svetlana Ogorodnikova, KGB agent to whom he allegedly gave secrets. She has pleaded guilty to spying.

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